

Historical Background

Cherry Beginnings: Cherry is one of Charlotte's most historic neighborhoods, first platted as a residential community in 1891 by John and Mary Myers. The neighborhood was developed from the Myers family's thousand-acre cotton farm which was located just outside Charlotte's city limits. For several decades, the neighborhood functioned as a village distinct from Charlotte following the pattern of such African American settlements as Biddleville and Greenville. Cherry is among the oldest surviving African American residential areas in Charlotte.

Cherry is unique in that it was the first neighborhood in Charlotte built especially to provide homeownership opportunities for laborers and working class blacks. Contrary to local stories, Cherry was not built as a servants' community for adjoining Myers

Park. Rather, Cherry was platted at least 20 years before Myers Park. The first homes in the neighborhood were built on Cherry, Main, and Luther Streets. By 1925, a total of 305 families lived in Cherry. It is estimated that as many as 65% were homeowners.

Cherry Neighborhood Center: Morgan Park and Morgan School were built in the mid 1920's on Baxter Street. In addition to a park and a school, the neighborhood also had several churches and small neighborhood stores, still in existence. These amenities made Cherry's development unique from other African American neighborhoods. The park and the tree-lined streets were often noted as the most striking attributes of the neighborhood. The trees were so prominent that the name of the neighborhood and street are said to have been inspired by the cherry trees that grew on the hillsides.



1935 map of Charlotte showing a portion of the plan area. All images in this section are courtesy of the Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room - Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.



The library at Morgan School about 1925.



Early view of Mt. Zion Lutheran Church. Luther Street took its name from the Church.



Early view of a duplex in Cherry.



Early view of houses on Baldwin Avenue in Cherry.



Early view of Myers Tabernacle AME Zion Church, built by residents on land donated by John and Mary Myers.



Early view of the Cherry retail buildings, Baxter at Baldwin.

City growth: As time passed, Cherry was surrounded by other development and was incorporated into the City of Charlotte. Myers Park was developed by the Myers family immediately to the south beginning in 1911. Its curving tree-lined streets, laid out by noted landscape architect John Nolen, became one of Charlotte's most prestigious neighborhoods. Immediately to the north-east of Cherry there was developed a small subdivision called Craighead Park, along what is now Torrence Street and Baldwin and Ranlo (originally Craighead) Avenues. This neighborhood was absorbed into Cherry in the 1950's when ethnic settlement patterns shifted.

Morehead Area Beginnings: Beginning about 1891, Edward Dilworth Latta had created Dilworth, a new residential and streetcar suburb centered on South and East Boulevards. In 1911, he began work on an extension of Dilworth. He hired Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., an eminent Boston landscape architect and city planner, for the project. For the curvilinear streets around Dilworth Road, Latta closely followed the Olmsted plan. East Morehead Street, near the eastern edge of the new development, was extended southward to Queens Road in Myers Park in a somewhat more direct route than Olmsted had proposed, though incorporating residential development with generous landscaping. Connections eastward into the older city were carefully limited. Over time the East Morehead area gradually came to be used primarily for offices. The Greenwood Cliff/Harding Place vicinity was rezoned for office use in 1965.

New Cross-town Arteries: In the late 1940's, Kings Drive and Independence Boulevard (more recently renamed Charlotte-towne Avenue) were constructed through the plan area. Kings Drive came along the western border of Cherry, following the path of Little Sugar Creek and connecting to East Morehead Street. Independence Boulevard was a major cross-town traffic artery extending from Southeast Charlotte, cutting through Cherry's northern edge, connecting via Stonewall Street and South Boulevard and onward to Wilkinson Boulevard.

Midtown Development: Charlottetowne Mall (later known as Midtown Square) was built at the intersection of Kings and Independence about 1958. It was built in part by channelizing and covering over Little Sugar Creek. As one of the first enclosed shopping malls in the South, it became a major attraction. The mall then attracted a strip of smaller commercial businesses along Kings Drive. The thoroughfares that surrounded Cherry carried increasing traffic from suburban neighborhoods into Uptown. Cherry, no longer an isolated village on the fringe of Uptown, was thrust into the midst of an urbanizing Midtown area.

Changes in Cherry: Changes also were occurring inside Cherry that destabilized the neighborhood. Many of the owner-occupied homes were being sold to investors. Once purchased, these homes were converted to rental properties. What had begun as a strong community of homeowners was evolving into a neighborhood of renters.

By the late 1960's, housing and other physical conditions in the neighborhood had deteriorated. **However**, conditions were not considered so bad as to warrant demolition, so Cherry escaped the fate of Brooklyn and other African American neighborhoods through Urban Renewal. **Responding in part to the neighborhood's physical conditions and other related concerns, an active residents' organization known as the Cherry Community Development Association began in the late 1960's.** In the mid 1970's, Cherry was designated as a Community Development Neighborhood Target Area, making it eligible to receive Federal funds for certain physical improvements. In 1976, a public improvements plan was approved by Council, outlining short term strategies for housing code enforcement and physical improvements.

To participate more fully in the City's efforts to upgrade the neighborhood, **residents** formed a nonprofit community development corporation **in 1977** – the Cherry Community Organization (CCO). A modified plan was adopted by Council in 1979, whereby

the City would lend funds to the CCO for a comprehensive housing and neighborhood improvement program. The CCO acquired properties from absentee landlords, owning and managing many of the units. **This model was heralded by some as one of the most innovative community projects in the country.** In addition, **in 1985** the Charlotte Housing Authority constructed the Tall Oaks townhome style apartment development, **which included a unique scattered-site approach.**

Freeway Loop: The Belk Freeway (southern and western leg of I-277) was constructed around the perimeter of Uptown Charlotte, opening in two phases— 1982 and 1988. It was constructed in part on land previously part of the Brooklyn neighborhood cleared through Urban Renewal. The freeway continued the isolation of Dilworth from Uptown except for connections at South Boulevard and McDowell Street. It did relieve Independence Boulevard in the Cherry/Midtown area (since renamed Charlottetowne Avenue) of its cross-town arterial function, allowing it to serve as a minor thoroughfare.



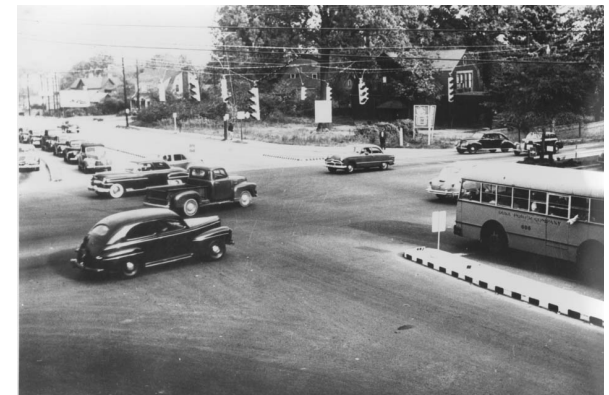
Independence Boulevard prior to construction of the Belk Freeway. (Champion Map Corporation, 1979)



Trolley entrance gate to Myers Park at Fourth and Queens, about 1912.



1941 view from Dilworth Road with Addison Apartments on East Morehead Street and Uptown beyond.



Intersection of East Morehead Street and Independence Boulevard about 1950.



Independence Boulevard near the Thompson Orphanage, about 1955.



1960's sign in the Brooklyn neighborhood announcing its demolition, a fate not carried out in Cherry.



Midtown Square mall prior to its demolition and replacement with the Metropolitan.

Further development in Cherry: Around 2000, Banc of America Community Development Corporation, in partnership with Cherry residents, led a program called the Cherry Affordable Housing Initiative, which built and sold new homes in the neighborhood. The program focused on affordable housing, primarily for longtime Cherry residents. These were mostly along Luther and Baxter Streets.

About 2005, the CCO sold property along Main Street to Stonehunt Development for a development of townhouses, with a senior citizen apartment facility at the center of the neighborhood. The Cherry Gardens apartment facility was completed and occupied. The townhomes remain unbuilt, and some street abandonment permits have expired as of 2011.

Metropolitan Development: By 2000, Midtown Square Mall had declined in occupancy, and Pappas Properties began planning a site redevelopment. The ambitious mixed use project incorporated residential condominiums, offices, restaurants, and retail including big box retail built along a pedestrian-friendly "Main Street" named Metropolitan Avenue. The project included a restoration of the long-buried Little Sugar Creek in collaboration with Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation. The Metropolitan opened in phases beginning in 2006, and has quickly become a center of activity for the surrounding area.

Little Sugar Creek Greenway: Ideas of Little Sugar Creek Greenway becoming an urban amenity began in the 1980's when local leaders were introduced to San Antonio's River Walk. Visions of gondolas navigat-

ing the creek as far as Freedom Park were reported in the news as was the new idea of greenways along Charlotte's Creeks.

Liz Hair, the first woman to be elected to and to chair the Board of County Commissioners was a supporter of parks and greenways. Her influence helped to start a movement. Liz Hair Nature Walk, a section of Little Sugar Creek Greenway adjacent to Carolina Healthcare System's main hospital just south of the plan area, has been named in her honor.

In 2004, a master plan for a greenway running the course of Little Sugar Creek from Cordelia Park (Optimist Park area) to the South Carolina state line was approved by the Mecklenburg County Board of County Commissioners. A bond referendum that included funding for the urban sections was approved that year. The greenway from 7th Street to Morehead Street was designed over the next three years, and construction began late in 2008. Progressive sections went into construction in the following years. A celebration for completing the 1.2 mile linear park, stream restoration and greenway trail is scheduled for April 2012.

Little Sugar Creek Greenway is now the green spine that connects the various destinations along the Midtown, Morehead and Cherry areas. The stream restoration that accompanied the greenway development is critical to this new urban corridor. Approximately a decade ago, this creek was one of the most polluted creeks in the state. Today both the quantity and the variety of aquatic species are on the increase, a sign of gradual improvement in water quality.